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SUBJECT: ELECTION WORKING GROUP FOCUSES ON CALENDAR REFORM
AND CIVIL VOTER REGISTRY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Election Working Group called for by the JCMB met for the first time on March 15 to energize work on elections. The group discussed options for electoral calendar reform, but agreed that the international community should not take a position on the outcome. The Civil Voter Registry pilot project getting underway in April will help determine the most cost-effective technologies and working methodology for the broader CVR effort to follow, including how to effectively work with the problematic Ministry of Interior. Embassy Kabul will prepare a draft paper for the next JCMB meeting in May outlining issues for JCMB decision and funding needs requiring donor support. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador Neumann attended the first Election Working Group (EWG) meeting called for by the JCMB on March

¶15. Ambassador Neumann emphasized the importance of energizing work addressing election issues, especially reducing costs and electoral calendar reform. He stressed that we are not advocating a particular solution. It is most important to resolve the systemic issues so the elections can be carried out without a crisis and yield results that are viewed as honest by the Afghans.

¶3. (SBU) Daoud Najafi, Chief Electoral Officer (IEC), said they are considering three options for reforming the electoral calendar: (1) Extend the President's term by one year; (2) Curtail the Parliament's term by one year; or (3) Or extend/curtail each by 6 months. UNAMA DSRSG Chris Alexander said Karzai does not favor extending his term and there is already a legal precedent for delaying Provincial Council elections. Ambassador Neumann emphasized that there is no reason for the IC to take a position.

¶3. (SBU) The EWG agreed to meet monthly and additionally as needed. Alexander reported that UNAMA is recruiting a Chief Election Advisor to the SRSRG, who will be the primary technical advisor to the IEC and act as secretary to the EWG. The group accepted Ambassador Neumann's offer for the U.S. Embassy to prepare a draft of the elections paper for the

forthcoming JCMB meeting on May 1. The group agreed that the previous paper raised awareness and focused attention on the issues, and this paper should outline issues for JCMB decision and funding issues requiring donor support. The group agreed to circulate the draft paper by the first week in April.

¶4. (SBU) Ambassador Neumann strongly supported getting moving on the Civil Voter Registry (CVR), and advised that the group look at consolidating CVR-related activities (e.g. ID cards, conscription, census, etc.). Alexander said UNAMA "couldn't agree more." A CVR pilot project is currently underway, and early feedback is for a unified system and deemphasizing cutting-edge technology. The census cannot be part of the CVR, but that there are back-office synergies. He flagged one issue: the Ministry of Interior (MOI) owns the ID card issue, and the Civil Administration side of the MOI has serious problems.

¶5. (SBU) UNDP reported that the final cost for the 2005 elections was \$172 million, and the remaining gap is currently \$12 million. If outstanding pledges totaling \$5.1 million (from Italy, Greece, and the U.S.) are received, and remaining assets of \$2.8 million can be sold, there will still remain a gap of just over \$2 million, so this shortfall is still an issue for the JCMB.

¶6. (SBU) The CVR pilot project costs \$336,000, begins in mid-April, and ends the first week in July. It will determine the feasibility and cost estimates for three options: (1) Iris scanning; (2) Facial recognition, i.e. photos; and (3) Manual system, i.e. fingerprints. It must be completed before the next steps for the CVR are taken.

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¶7. (SBU) The group was concerned because completion of the CVR pilot will require MOI cooperation, capacity, and leadership, which have so far been lacking. MOI is on the steering committee, but the MOI and the Ministry of Finance differ over who should pay the daily subsistence allowance for the field staff, who have been "maximalist in their demands," according to UNAMA. (NOTE: MOI and IEC later signed a memorandum of understanding agreeing that MOI will pay the allowances. END NOTE.) An important element of the CVR pilot will be determining how to work with MOI and document "how the MOI is found wanting." Alexander said he hopes the JCMB paper will also highlight needed MOI reforms.

¶8. (SBU) Current drafts of the new election law reflect a blend of single non-transferable voting (SNTV) and proportional representation (PR) with closed lists, but the exact proportion is the point of departure for the political debate. The EC representative said there is no interest among donors in funding a complicated system. UNDP said it is running a \$6.4 million election program to staff IEC regional offices and build IEC capacity in cooperation with IFES, TAF, and others. The program currently has \$1.4m in funding.

NEUMANN